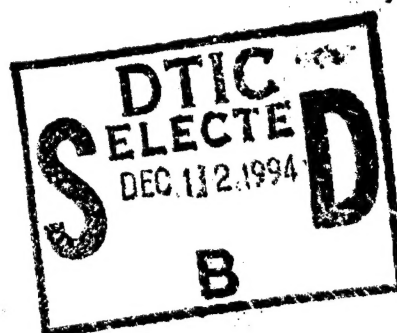


# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA



## THESIS



**PRESIDENTIAL APPROACHES TO ORGANIZING FOREIGN  
POLICY MECHANISMS**

by

Edmund B. Hernandez

September 1994

Thesis Advisor:

Rodney Kennedy-Minott

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PRESIDENTIAL APPROACHES TO ORGANIZING FOREIGN POLICY  
MECHANISMS

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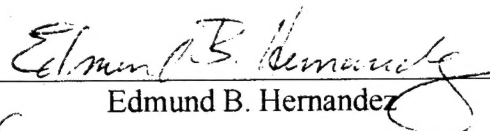
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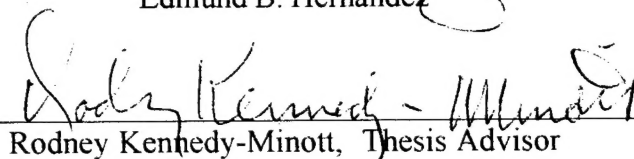
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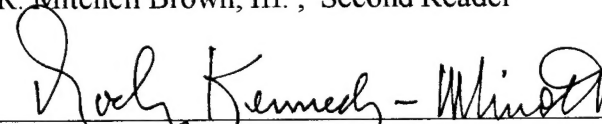
  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The organization of foreign policy mechanisms will determine the types of policies a President can create. Presidents organize their administrations using a formalistic, collegial or competitive approach. In order to manage foreign policy a President must develop a balance between formalistic and collegial approaches. This thesis analyzes how the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations structured their national security organizations and examines their policy decisions towards the Vietnam crisis. Eisenhower used a formalistic approach to create a highly structured organization with defined procedures to review foreign policy issues. Kennedy's style was far less rigid and relied on a high degree of personal interaction and group problem solving. This thesis demonstrates that there was a direct relation between the manner in which the US foreign policy apparatus was structured and the decisions that were made to escalate US involvement in the Vietnam War. This thesis concludes that the formalistic and collegial approaches are complimentary and that a President should utilize a combination of both approaches.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each President structures his foreign policy organization to suit his own leadership and management style. Re-organizing the executive branch is the prerogative of the President but he must consider that certain organizational approaches are more conducive to managing foreign policy than others. A formalistic approach utilizes a hierarchical structure and formal procedures in order to rigorously analyze a particular issue. Such a structure is most analogous to a staff system and can create policy statements based upon thoroughly researched facts and critical analysis. The results can then be presented to the President for his approval at formal meetings. This approach can also be used to coordinate and integrate policy among the major governmental agencies that deal with foreign policy. The major drawback to this approach however is that it can possibly screen vital information from the decision maker and is very inflexible in responding to immediate crises because of the lead times required to collect information and conduct analysis. The collegial approach utilizes the ability of the decision maker to manage the personalities of his advisors and direct the energies of the group towards a policy solution. This approach has the advantage of being able to respond to the immediate needs of foreign policy. The danger to using this approach is that it can lead to instituting ad hoc, temporary solutions to foreign policy problems rather than addressing root causes of the problem and planning for the long term.

The major changes in the US national security organization between the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations was a significant contributing factor to American involvement in Vietnam. Dwight D. Eisenhower generally utilized a formalistic approach to managing foreign policy. He established a strong National Security Council

to deal with long term foreign policy issues and had a strong Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to deal with immediate problems and crises. Eisenhower faced the Vietnam problem directly and was able to develop a solution to prevent further Communist gains in Southeast Asia. After John F. Kennedy became President he radically altered the US foreign policy apparatus. Kennedy did not care for formalized structures and dismantled the NCS created by Eisenhower; he relied more upon his close advisors rather than on the established governmental officials when making foreign policy. Kennedy did not directly confront the Vietnam problem and instead applied temporary fixes as an alternative to establishing a stable government in South Vietnam. This policy eventually led to deeper American involvement in Vietnam and the escalation of the war.

The Vietnam crisis illustrates that the structure of an organization has a definite impact upon the types of policies that can be created. The best approach to organizing for foreign policy is a combination of both the collegial and formalistic approach. The formalistic structure should be modeled along the line of Eisenhower's NSC and would be used to systematically analyze foreign policy issues and develop policy options. This organization would support a collegial mechanism modeled along the Eisenhower/Dulles relationship or the Kennedy circle of close advisors and be composed of the President's primary foreign policy advisors.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The structure of an organization will determine the types of policies it can create. Each President re-organizes the national security apparatus to suit his style. In Robert Johnson's work *Managing the White House*, he develops three methods which are utilized by Presidents to manage their Administrations: the formalistic, competitive and collegial approaches.<sup>1</sup> In order to manage foreign policy, a President must develop a balance among these approaches realizing the strengths and weaknesses each offers.

The formalistic approach relies on an orderly analysis of the issues in order to make the best decision. This system uses hierarchical structures and orderly processes in order to formulate policy. The formalistic system strives to minimize conflict among its members. The emphasis is "on finding the best solution to national problems rather than working out 'compromise settlements' on conflicting views."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Tanner Johnson, *Managing the White House: An Intimate Study of the Presidency*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), 5-8. It must be noted that Johnson's work has been harshly criticized for its poor writing style and weak analysis. This does not mean that the basic framework of the three approaches is invalid. The model still remains a legitimate point of departure for analyzing how Presidents organize their administrations. Alexander L. George has used the framework in his book *Presidential Decision making in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* as the basis for further analysis into Presidential decision making.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 3.

This approach lends itself to a staff system where formal procedures are established to formulate and develop policy. An issue can be analyzed and debated at the lowest levels where the staff would work out any conflicting views. The agreed solution would then be forwarded to the decision maker for his approval. A major advantage of this approach is that it seeks the optimal solution and does not place a huge time requirement on the part of the decision maker. The disadvantages are that information may become distorted as it goes through the evaluation process and leaves the decision maker with an incorrect picture of the world, and such a system is not flexible enough to respond to crisis situations.

The competitive approach depends upon free expression of views and thrives on conflict among subordinates. This system is the polar opposite of the formalistic approach and stresses conflict among subordinates in order to find solutions.<sup>3</sup> President Franklin D. Roosevelt used this approach with his administration and chose to rely on close advisors rather than governmental agencies to conduct the business of foreign policy. The major drawback to this approach is that it can lead to situations where subordinates will withhold vital information from the decision maker because of competitive pressures. This approach requires a leader of

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 6.



FDR's political skill to manage and would be less conducive to dealing with the issues of modern foreign policy where quick and timely information is critical to the decision making process. Given the modern day environment where information is exchanged quickly, the application of the competitive approach could be more costly than any potential benefits that might be gained.

Finally, the collegial approach relies on the decision maker's ability to manage conflict among subordinates and direct the efforts of the foreign policy team towards achieving a solution. This system strives to find a balance between the formalistic and the competitive; it tries to utilize the best characteristics of each and applies them to achieve the best decisions. This approach requires more involvement from the decision maker and may lead to "group think" rather than achieving substantive policy decisions. Given these three approaches, is any one of them better or more conducive to managing foreign affairs?

Johnson suggests that a President must seek a middle ground between the formalistic approach and the competitive approaches, which means that he should pursue a collegial approach.<sup>4</sup> The costs of the competitive approach are prohibitively high and require an exceptional person to practically apply it to US foreign policy making. A better

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 7.

choice is to develop a style that lies somewhere in the middle ground between the formalistic and collegial approaches.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how previous Presidents, specifically the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations, organized their foreign policy apparatus and to draw conclusions as to the most effective organizational approach. Eisenhower used a formalistic approach to create a highly structured organization with defined procedures to review foreign policy issues.<sup>5</sup> Kennedy's style was far less rigid and relied on a high degree of personal interaction and group problem solving.<sup>6</sup>

This thesis will first analyze the foreign policy machinery of each Administration in terms of these approaches. Next, it will examine the performance of each respective Administration towards Vietnam and evaluate the effectiveness of the approach. This work examines US involvement in Vietnam and argues this particular crisis slowly dragged America into a war partly as a result of a break down in the American foreign policy apparatus. This work will show that there was a direct relationship with the manner in which the US became involved in Vietnam and the foreign policy mechanisms that existed at the time.

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<sup>5</sup>Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decision Making in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 152-154.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 157-158.

The criteria used to determine the effectiveness of each approach include (1) the degree to which the decision-making machinery screens and distorts information; (2) the extent to which the decision maker is exposed to both substantive and interpersonal conflict; (3) the overall responsiveness of the decision process; and (4) the thoroughness with which alternatives are staffed out and decisions are weighed.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first and second sections examine the Eisenhower and the Kennedy Administrations respectively and analyze the effects of their approach in dealing with the Vietnam problem. The third section examines the trade-offs between each approach in the previous sections, covers lessons learned for future Administrations and makes recommendations which may help avoid pitfalls.

Organization of the foreign policy mechanisms are important because they can significantly impact on how policy choices are made. Foreign policy is too complex to be handled by a single person or on an ad hoc basis; this can lead to reactionary policies which in turn can lead to disastrous consequences. The process of making foreign policy is complex because it involves collecting information, analyzing sometimes conflicting information to understand what it means, deciding on a course of action and executing

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<sup>7</sup>Johnson, *Managing the White House*, 237.

this action. This is an iterative and ongoing process which suggests that a mechanism is required to review issues and problems systematically. Today a President cannot afford to totally re-invent the wheel and must accept some established formal mechanisms to provide a focus for issues. There simply is not enough time for a newly inaugurated President to get off top dead center and "learn" to be a foreign policy leader.

Every Administration has difficulty making purposeful and coherent foreign policy and there is no cook book solution to the problem. The end of the Cold War has made the world a more dangerous place and the crafting of foreign policy even more challenging. Making foreign policy decisions will not become any simpler. Utilizing a particular organizational approach to manage foreign affairs will not necessarily lead to a "correct" solution or even a favorable resolution to a crisis. But what these approaches do provide is a choice of systematic and manageable methods to foreign policy rather than reactive and haphazard alternatives. Examining the manner in which previous President's have organized their foreign policy mechanisms to deal with foreign policy dilemmas could provide insights on how to deal with present day problems.

## II. THE EISENHOWER FOREIGN POLICY ORGANIZATION

Richard Johnson has characterized the Eisenhower Administration as an example of the formalistic approach because of its orientation towards orderly and systematic processes. Eisenhower did create a more structured administration than any of his predecessors. He used his experience as a career army staff officer to create an organization that was able to face the foreign policy problems of the early Cold War era. Critics have charged that there was too much organization in the Eisenhower Administration which projected the impression that Eisenhower was indecisive and not executing his duties as President. A closer examination of the Eisenhower foreign policy machinery will reveal that this was not the case and that Eisenhower used both formal and informal means to manage foreign policy.<sup>8</sup>

President Dwight D. Eisenhower created several mechanisms to manage foreign policy.<sup>9</sup> First, he established a strong National Security Council with formal procedures and

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<sup>8</sup>Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1982), 101.

<sup>9</sup>I.M. Destler, *Our Own Worst Enemy: The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy*, (Simon and Shuster, 1984), 175.

defined areas of responsibility. Second, he created the Staff Secretary position to help keep track of national security issues for the White House. Finally, Eisenhower selected John Foster Dulles to be Secretary of State and granted him great latitude in which to conduct foreign policy. These three mechanisms allowed Eisenhower to deal with the multitude of foreign policy dilemmas he faced.

#### **A.EISENHOWER'S NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL**

During the 1952 campaign Eisenhower accused President Truman for not using the National Security Council to its fullest potential and promised to revitalize the national security apparatus.<sup>10</sup> Truman underutilized the Council because he felt that the NSC impinged upon his Presidential prerogatives. The NSC was legislated by Congress as part of the National Security Act of 1947 in order to better coordinate US political-military affairs. Truman believed that the President should not be dictated to as to whom he should consult with in the area of foreign matters. Rather than legitimize the NSC, Truman literally stayed away and rarely attended the initial meetings of the Council. Truman used the Council "only as a place for recommendations to be worked out...the policy itself has to come down from the

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 172.

President, as all final decisions have to be made by him."<sup>11</sup> Only after the outbreak of the Korean War did Truman regularly attend Council meetings; but even then the overall contribution of the NSC to foreign policy was limited to the creation of position papers rather than substantive foreign policy guidance.

Eisenhower did not have to deal with the problems Truman faced in terms of challenges the NSC posed to Presidential power. By the time Eisenhower took office the NSC had existed for five years and proven itself a useful tool for staff work. Eisenhower asked Robert Cutler, a Boston banker and lawyer who wrote speeches for the President during the campaign, to develop a plan to re-organize the Council. Cutler's recommendations became the basis for transforming the National Security Council.

In his report Cutler raised several important points about the operation and organization of the NSC. He emphasized the need to focus on national security issues; specifically to "integrate the manifold aspects of national security policy (such as foreign, military, economic, fiscal, internal security, psychological) to the end that security policies finally recommended to the President shall be both represented and fused, rather than compartmentalized and

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<sup>11</sup>Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs of Harry S. Truman: years of Trail and Hope Vol. Two*, (New York: Doubleday & Company INC., 1956), 59.

several."<sup>12</sup> Cutler also stressed the advisory nature of the Council; the NSC under Eisenhower would have *limited* responsibility for overseeing implementation of Council decisions and *no* operational capabilities. Another concern was the actual process of policy formulation; in order produce realistic and intelligent policy there had to be a thorough analysis of the issue where all alternatives were critically examined. This required developing a process that balanced between "obtaining the advice of all who have some responsibility for the subject matter under consideration and...restricting attendance to that level which would permit intimate, frank and fruitful discussion."<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, each of these recommendations was geared towards developing the best option and minimizing conflict among Council and Staff members. Eisenhower approved the recommendations in the Cutler Report. Once implemented these changes transformed the NSC from a simple policy coordinating organization into a complex highly structured institution with clearly delineated responsibilities and procedures that guided its operation.

Three major changes occurred to the NSC structure. The first change was in the Council membership. During the Eisenhower Administration membership on the Council was

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<sup>12</sup>Robert Cutler, "The Development of the National Security Council" in *Decisions of the Highest Order*, 56. Originally appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, 34 (1956), 441-458.

<sup>13</sup>James Lay and Robert Johnson, *Organizational History of the National Security Council*, 1960, 23.



expanded to included the President, Vice-President, Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of the Office of Mobilization, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Director of the Budget.<sup>14</sup> The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs served as advisors to the Council; other department heads would attend as required or as the President directed. In the absence of the President, the Vice President would chair the meeting rather than the Secretary of State as was done in the Truman Administration. Overall attendance at NSC meeting grew to over fifteen participants and observers.<sup>15</sup>

The second important change was the creation of the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The Special Assistant was similar to Truman's Executive Secretary but with far greater power. Besides serving as the Executive Officer of the Council, Eisenhower's Special Assistant chaired both major NSC staff agencies (Planning Board and Operations Coordination Board), was responsible for determining the Council's agenda, personally briefed the President on security issues, focused arguments during the planning stages and monitored the implementation of policy.

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<sup>14</sup>Cutler, "Development of the NSC", 61.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 61.

Over the years the National Security Adviser grew in power and prominence rivalling the Secretary of State. This was not the case with the early NSC. During the Truman Administration Admiral Sidney Souers served as the Executive Secretary and described the role of the Secretary as "an anonymous servant of the Council"<sup>16</sup> who must "be the political confidant of the President, and willing to *subordinate his personal views* on policy to his task of coordinating the views of responsible officials."<sup>17</sup> Robert Cutler, who served as Eisenhower's first Special Assistant, energized the position with a new vigor but for the most part maintained the low-profile example set by Sid Souers.

The final change occurred in the organization of the NSC staff. The staff consisted of a Planning Board and an Operations Coordinating Board (OCB). The Assistant for Planning from each agency represented on the Council was a member of the Planning Board. Each member of the Planning Board had "a presidential commission entitling him to any information he might want from his department."<sup>18</sup> Under the supervision of the Special Assistant, the Planning Board carefully staffed out policy papers.

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<sup>16</sup>Sidney W. Souers, "Policy Formulation for National Security" in *Decision of the Highest Order*, Inderfurth and Johnson, eds., 50. Originally appeared in *American Political Service Review*, 43 (June 1949), 534-543.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 50. Italics added.

<sup>18</sup>Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 126.

In order to provide the National Security Council with as complete a picture as possible on security issues, the Planning Board developed an exhaustive analysis process. Any part of the Council could bring up issues for Planning Board consideration. Items for review were scheduled well in advance so that Board members had sufficient time to prepare. Prior to drafting an initial policy statement on a particular issue, the Board required several meetings in order to collect basic information and intelligence estimates upon which to write the draft statement. Once this information was collected, a work group would write a draft policy statement. These drafts had a specific format that included general objectives, policy guidance and financial estimates. From these drafts the Planning Board would begin the task of serious examination and revision in order to focus the paper into a policy recommendation. Disagreements were noted and sent to the Council as "split" papers detailing the differing views. The final policy paper was sent to Council members several days in advance of the meeting at which it was to be addressed.

After the approval of a paper, the Operations Coordination Board took over and directed the cognizant governmental department to implement the Council's decisions. Generally, the OCB formulated a plan to operationalize the policy and then coordinated between agencies to ensure implementation was carried out. The OCB did not have the

authority to order the various agencies to carry out the Council's decisions; it was in no way an operational entity. Rather, the OCB only monitored and reported on the progress of implementation.

The NSC's entire process of policy formulation and implementation was described by Robert Cutler as "policy hill." At the bottom of the hill the Planning Board would systematically analyze an issue and develop a policy paper on the subject. These formal papers then went up to the Council membership and were formally presented at the weekly Thursday meeting. After the issue was presented and all points actively argued, the President, at the summit of the hill, would make the final decision on the paper. Once the President approved the policy paper, it became official US policy and would go back down to the cognizant department for implementation. The OCB would then coordinate and monitor the implementation of the policy.

Eisenhower's National Security Council was the quintessential formalistic mechanism; it operated with lock-step precision examining, arguing, revising and refining an issue in order to distill the optimal policy. The NSC served as the forum in which to examine long range foreign policy problems and develop US responses. This system limited conflict among its members; it did stress the importance of fully expressing differences on a particular issue but achieved a resolution by either deciding among Planning Board

members or from the President making a final decision himself. As a device for integrating and coordinating foreign policy, Eisenhower's NSC had fulfilled the President's campaign promise of restoring the organization into a vital part of the foreign policy apparatus. Finally, the biggest advantage this system provided was to conserve the time of the decision maker. By the time an issue had reached the Council, it had been rigorously researched so that the Council could concentrate on the central issue rather than trying to examine the details.

This system did have shortcomings that prevented it from becoming the only means to conduct foreign policy making. Eisenhower was never really satisfied with the OCB operation; he expected that once an issue was decided upon that it would be carried out, not returned to the Council. The OCB portion of the Council was weak because it had no authority to enforce implementation and then problems would simply fall back into the Council. Further, because of its size and lead-time requirements, the NSC was unable to respond to crisis situations. For day-to-day problems Eisenhower relied on other structures to help manage foreign policy.

#### **B. THE STAFF SECRETARY**

The position of Staff Secretary was created because of a mix-up in paper work: "someone had done something unaware

that another line of activity had begun."<sup>19</sup> In order to ensure such mistakes would not happen again, Eisenhower applied a practice used during his Army service, ordering the Staff Secretary into existence. General Paul T. Carroll, Eisenhower's national security and intelligence liaison, served as the first Staff Secretary. After Carroll's sudden death he was succeeded by General Andrew Goodpaster. This is significant because Goodpaster assumed Carroll's duties which included assisting Chief of Staff Sherman Adams manage daily national security issues and monitoring secret cables to the President. From these inherited responsibilities the Staff Secretary role was able to do the things Eisenhower wanted done outside the NSC system.

At first the Staff Secretary was simply a paperwork coordinator who managed all defense related documents that went before the President. But the position grew in importance and responsibilities as the President directed "sensitive business through the staff secretary rather than the NSC or his special assistant."<sup>20</sup> After the regular NSC meeting Eisenhower held an informal gathering of the main policy makers.<sup>21</sup> At these meetings Goodpaster would write summaries of the discussion and like Robert Cutler "saw that

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>20</sup>John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the NSC from Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Company, INC., 1991), 65.

<sup>21</sup>Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 134.

critical participants were not frozen out of discussion and that Eisenhower's decisions were carried out."<sup>22</sup> Goodpaster also managed communications and information that went directly to the President. Eventually Goodpaster gained the trust of Secretary of State Dulles and was occasionally asked to sit in on meetings between the Secretary and the President; this became standard procedure with Dulles's successor Christian Herter. During the Taiwan Strait crisis Eisenhower sent Goodpaster to obtain an estimate of the situation from CINCPAC Admiral Felix Stump in Pearl Harbor. Goodpaster's visit drew less attention than calling the Admiral to Washington.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Goodpaster supervised the U-2 reconnaissance missions which included the May 1960 shoot down of Francis Gary Powers.

While the NSC served the formal staffing function, the Staff Secretary was able to provide immediate responsiveness to the President's daily foreign policy requirements. The Staff Secretary served as another source of information that Eisenhower could use in order to develop his policy position: "on a host of questions, the staff secretary actively sought out knowledge the President desired, represented Eisenhower's views to others, and brought problems back to the President based on his own observations."<sup>24</sup>     The Staff Secretary

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>23</sup>Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 67.

provided flexibility but was in no position to handle the bulk of US foreign policy. By Goodpaster's ranking of Eisenhower's foreign policy hierarchy, the Secretary of State was the primary advisor, followed by the National Security Advisor and finally the Staff Secretary.<sup>25</sup>

### **C. SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN FOSTER DULLES**

The single most important foreign policy mechanism was the way Eisenhower utilized his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Eisenhower entrusted the conduct of foreign policy to Dulles; he served as the point man and was a dominant force in shaping US foreign policy. Dulles worked tirelessly to protect US interests and frequently traveled overseas as the President's envoy. Because of Dulles's dominance the popular view of the relationship between Eisenhower and Dulles was that the Secretary dictated US foreign policy and that the President simply deferred to the Secretary. The impression portrayed to the public, and exploited by political opponents, was that Eisenhower was an absentee President who allowed his Cabinet members to wield the true power. Although Eisenhower granted Secretary Dulles a great deal of autonomy, the President always made the final

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 67.



decision on foreign policy matters. There were two major factors that re-enforce Eisenhower's absentee image and must be examined in order to understand the manner in which he utilized Dulles to manage foreign affairs.

The first factor was the outward appearance projected to the public. There were organizational procedures and actions taken by the administration which seemingly isolated the President from real problems. The apparent dominance of Chief of Staff Sherman Adams in approving matters before going to the President and Eisenhower's insistence that problems should be settled at the lowest levels were both criticized for serving as filters for screening out possibly critical information. Sherman Adams's role as the "omnipotent palace guardian"<sup>26</sup> has been overstated since Adams simply carried out the expected duties of a chief of staff. The practice of resolving problems at the lowest level was translated by critics as avoiding substantive problems. Eisenhower did not evade making the major decisions; but he believed that minor problems be handled below the Presidential level and that only the major issues should reach the President. Eisenhower's performance at press conferences, where he sometimes referred questions to Secretary Dulles rather than answer himself, added to the sense of Presidential remoteness. This was unfortunate timing

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<sup>26</sup>Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 147.

since the President usually met with the press on days after Dulles had his news conferences. Therefore it appeared that Eisenhower simply repeated, with a slight variation, what the Secretary had stated the day before. Eisenhower was weary of the press and chose to be guarded and evasive rather than provide a glib answer that possibly could be detrimental in the long term.<sup>27</sup>

The second major factor contributing to Eisenhower's apparent Presidential absenteeism was his delegation of authority to his subordinates. The President relied upon his Cabinet members to take charge and run their respective departments. Eisenhower once berated Defense Secretary Charles Wilson for trying to get the President's advice on how to deal with an internal operation problem in the Defense Department.<sup>28</sup> Eisenhower provided guidelines to his Cabinet members and would allow them to execute policy as they saw fit. This same standard was applied to foreign affairs where Eisenhower expected Dulles to develop "specific policy, including the decision where the administration would stand and what course of action would be followed in each international crisis."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Stephen Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1988), 67.

<sup>28</sup>Johnson, *Managing the White House*, 84.

<sup>29</sup>Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report*, 87 in *Powers of the President in Foreign Affairs*, Edgar E. Robinson, (San Francisco: Commonwealth Club of California, 1966), 95.

Among all his Cabinet members President Eisenhower developed the closest working relationship with Secretary Dulles. There was a sense of trust and mutual respect between these men. Dulles had immediate access to Eisenhower and "was the only Cabinet member who could speak with the President at the White House without a witness being present."<sup>30</sup> Dulles always kept the President informed: "The two men were in daily touch even when Dulles was out of the country...if they could not talk by telephone because Dulles was overseas, they exchanged coded cables."<sup>31</sup> Further, Eisenhower relieved Dulles of administrative responsibilities usually associated with the Secretary of State in order that Dulles could concentrate on managing foreign policy.<sup>32</sup> The President knew Dulles's strengths and weaknesses and used the Secretary to his best potential. Eisenhower wrote of Dulles:

I still think of him, as I always have, as an intensive student of foreign affairs. He is well-informed and, in this subject at least, is deserving, I think, of his reputation as a "wise" man...he believes in the United States, in the dignity of man, and in moral values...he is not particularly persuasive in presentation and, at times seems to have a curious lack of understanding as to how his words and manner may affect another personality...my only doubts concerning him lie in the field of personality, not in his capacity as a student of foreign affairs.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Herman Finer, *Dulles Over Suez*, (Chicago:Quadrangle Books, 1964), 73.

<sup>31</sup>Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 87.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 142.

The individual freedom in which to operate, granted not only to Dulles but to all Cabinet secretaries, drew the criticism that Eisenhower had abdicated his Presidency. Such criticism does not take into account that the President cannot possibly manage and know the detailed operations of each department; any President who tries to run the various departments from the White House will only get bogged down in minute details and ultimately accomplish nothing. The operation of the executive branch, especially in the area of foreign policy, is too complex a process for a single person to contend with. There are dangers to allowing the Secretary too much autonomy. The Secretary could misrepresent the President's position which could lead to a greater crisis. Relying solely on information from the Secretary could screen out vital information. These drawbacks need to be recognized and measures taken to counter potential effects on the decision making process. Critics aside, Eisenhower gave Dulles great latitude in which to act but always retained the final decision on all matters; the President delegated his authority, not his constitutional responsibilities.

The major effect of having a strong Secretary of State was that it drew political criticism away from the President: "Dulles was the only postwar Secretary of State who

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<sup>33</sup>Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, Robert H. Ferrel, ed. (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1981), 237.

consistently took a harder foreign-policy line than the President he served"<sup>34</sup> The Secretary would draw the serious criticism while the President remained popular. Furthermore, it relieved the President of having to directly manage his foreign policy. Eisenhower depended upon Secretary Dulles to manage foreign affairs in accordance with his guidelines while the President managed the bigger picture of both foreign and domestic concerns.

Overall the Eisenhower Administration was certainly systematic in its approach to foreign affairs, but it was not a rigidly cold and calculating machine. The organization tended towards a formalistic approach but also used other mechanisms that could respond to immediate problems. The reorganized NSC provided a means for long term planning, allowed the major government agencies to better integrate their actions, and created a body of policy guidance in which to operate. The NSC was not useful for quick response to crisis situations, but there were other devices that could be used, and in many cases problems were handled outside the NSC system. General Goodpaster's role as Staff Secretary allowed Eisenhower an alternative method to handle sensitive matters discretely and provided another source of information. But by far the primary mechanism for managing foreign affairs was the manner in which Eisenhower utilized Secretary of State

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<sup>34</sup>Destler, *Own Worst Enemy*, 174.

Dulles to deal directly with the major foreign policy dilemmas. The NSC provided a systematic means by which seriously analyze issues while the Staff Secretary and the Secretary of State provided flexibility. We can now examine the organization in action by analyzing how Eisenhower managed the Indochina Crisis of 1954.

#### **D.THE INDOCHINA CRISIS 1954**

President Eisenhower viewed Asia as a region vital to US national security. The possibility existed that if Vietnam fell under Communist control that the rest of Southeast Asia would also turn Communist. In his 1952 campaign Eisenhower had criticized Truman for the loss of China in 1948 and in 1953 his Administration had just ended the Korean War. The US was already committed to France's efforts in Indochina; from 1950 to 1954 America provided the French \$1.2 billion to fight the war.<sup>35</sup> France's imminent defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May of 1954 created a difficult foreign policy dilemma for Eisenhower; he had to decide if America should intervene to prevent the fall of the French and risk embroiling the US in a lost cause or allow the Communists to achieve gains in Southeast Asia.

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<sup>35</sup>Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War 1945-1990*, (New York: McGraw Hill Inc., 1991), 161.

US action in the 1954 Indochina Crisis to block further Communist expansion occurred in two phases. In the first phase Eisenhower had to determine if the US should intervene and relieve the siege. In the second phase the US slowly assumed the French role and tried to cut any further losses by supporting the Diem government in South Vietnam against Ho Chi Minh's government in the North. The formalistic aspects of the Eisenhower Administration provided very little in terms of *immediate* response to the crisis. Rather, it was Eisenhower's extensive use of Secretary Dulles both to garner support for American intervention during the Dien Bien Phu phase and to represent US interests at the subsequent Geneva Conference that resolved the crisis.

Each of the parties involved in the Indochina Crisis of 1954 were pursuing different interests. The Viet Minh were fighting for their independence. France was trying to reestablish its colonial presence. The Chinese and Soviets had an opportunity to prevent American influence in the region. The US wanted to prevent the further expansion of Communism. Only the Americans viewed the Indochina Crisis in terms of a Communist threat. Thus, the war in Indochina became a test of America's Containment Policy in Southeast Asia. Eisenhower and Dulles generally pursued a course that attempted to prevent further Communist expansion and at the same time tried to create a collective security mechanism for Southeast Asia.

After the Second World War France returned to Indochina in hopes of regaining control over its former colony. In 1946 the French refused to recognize the Ho Chi Minh government and started a civil war against the nationalist Viet Minh. Because the French did not seriously plan or organize any effective government or military force, the war raged on for eight years. In 1954 General Navarre arrived to take command of the French forces. Under the Navarre Plan the French launched a massive offensive and chose to battle the Viet Minh in a remote valley at Dien Bien Phu. John Foster Dulles was enthusiastic about the plan and stated it would defeat the Communists by the end of 1955.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately Navarre underestimated the war fighting capabilities of the Viet Minh. By the end of March 1954 the French were losing badly at Dien Bien Phu, where the Viet Minh had laid siege to the French outpost. On March 20 the French Chief of Staff General Paul Ely went to Washington to ask for American assistance.

General Ely's request for US military intervention was enthusiastically met by his American counterpart, Admiral Arthur Radford who offered massive air support to lift the siege. The Radford plan, called VULTURE, would conduct night air strikes on the Communist positions around Dien Bien Phu

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<sup>36</sup>Robert Schulzinger, *American Diplomacy in the 20th Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 236.



with B-29 bombers and carrier based aircraft. Air Force Chief of Staff General Nathan Twining also supported the plan and believed that atomic bombs could be used tactically.<sup>37</sup> It is unclear as to whether Dulles actually advocated the air strike plan, let alone the use of atomic weapons. The Secretary seemed to favor some sort of international intervention.<sup>38</sup> Eisenhower considered VULTURE only as a possible option but would not commit America without Congressional approval and support from the British.

Eisenhower and Dulles worked to secure support for American intervention. Dulles went to Congressional leaders on April 3 and asked to get a resolution for US intervention. But Congress was cool to the idea when they discovered that not all the joint chiefs agreed on the air strike plan. Army Chief of Staff General Matthew Ridgeway, who commanded UN forces in Korea, did not put much faith in the plan and opposed any intervention in Indochina.<sup>39</sup> Air strikes would not be sufficient to achieve a victory and it appeared that a massive infusion of ground troops would be necessary.

Congress indicated that they might approve of US intervention if the British also entered the conflict, furthermore France had to give up its colonial ambitions and

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<sup>37</sup>LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 164.

<sup>38</sup>Schulzinger, *American Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, 237.

<sup>39</sup>LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 163.

grant Indochina its independence. Eisenhower wrote Prime Minister Churchill suggesting that the US and Great Britain join together and intervene to save the French.<sup>40</sup> On April 20 Dulles went to London and tried to obtain Churchill's approval, but was refused. British Foreign Minister Eden believed that any military intervention would only escalate the crisis and potentially lead to another world war. The British viewed the French war in Indochina as a lost cause and not worth diluting their political capital. Without a Congressional resolution or British support, Eisenhower decided that the US should not risk its national prestige to prevent the fall of Dien Bien Phu. Instead the US concentrated on influencing the diplomatic effort at the upcoming Geneva Conference.

On May 7 Dien Bien Phu fell to Viet Minh forces. The French defeat meant the Viet Minh had the diplomatic advantage at the Geneva Conference and could dictate terms to the French. This was of great concern to Eisenhower and Dulles since the US supported France and feared the French would simply surrender all of Indochina to the Communists.<sup>41</sup> The entire crisis placed the US in a foreign policy bind. Eisenhower and Dulles did not want to alienate French support for European defense nor at the same time to give up more

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>41</sup>Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 77.

territory to the Communists: "the administration feared that the conference might endorse major communist gains...Yet to remain aloof would deprive the United States of any means to influence the outcome."<sup>42</sup>

In order to forestall any unacceptable French concessions, the American delegation, led by Secretary Dulles, remained purposely indifferent at the talks. This tactic projected the impression that the US would intervene militarily should the French conclude the talks with an agreement unacceptable to the Americans. Dulles's behavior at the conference was especially abrasive towards the other parties present; in particular the Chinese. At one time the Secretary left the conference, instructing the remaining delegation to act only as an "interested party" and to agree to nothing that compromised the territorial integrity of Vietnam.<sup>43</sup> Dulles worked tirelessly to obtain support for collective action into Indochina by the allies. The US planned for possible military intervention with other allies in late May. Dulles tried to obtain British support, but Foreign Minister Eden would work on an agreement only after the conclusion of the Geneva Conference. The Secretary also tried to persuade the French to internationalize the war, but

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<sup>42</sup>George C. Herring, "'A Good Stout Effort'; John Foster Dulles and the Indochina Crisis, 1954-1955." in *Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*, Richard Immerman, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 219.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 220.

France and the US could not even agree on terms of any US intervention.

The negotiations in Geneva stalled until a new French government under Pierre Mendes-France was elected into power. Mendes-France vowed to reach an accord to end the war or resign his post by mid-July 1954. Arrival of a new French prime minister fundamentally changed the US position. Since an agreement was likely to occur, the US could not militarily intervene based upon failed negotiations. Instead the US pressured the French to seek an agreement that would not validate any Communist gains. When the French conceded the northern part of the country to Ho Chi Minh, Secretary Dulles would not return to the conference."<sup>44</sup> Eisenhower ordered Dulles to consult with Mendes-France and after hearing the Prime Minister's plan, the Secretary gave in on his hard line stance. In order to obtain US support for a settlement at Geneva, the French, with British assistance, persuaded the Americans to accept a "seven-point plan" that allowed the non-Communist portions of Indochina to receive military aid from foreign governments.<sup>45</sup> Dulles seemingly accepted these conditions as a basis for an agreement at Geneva.

On July 21 an armistice was reached between the Viet Minh and the French. Conditions of the settlement included

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 224.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 224.

withdrawal of Ho Chi Minh's forces north of the 17th parallel, no foreign alliances or foreign military bases in Indochina and the conduct of free elections in order to reunify the country. Since the Viet Minh already controlled two-thirds of the countryside, Ho had to be pressured by the Soviets and Chinese to withdraw to the north. The Communists were confident that they could easily achieve victory in any election because Ho was the most popular and well known nationalist in Vietnam. Naturally, from the American view control of North Vietnam under Communism was unacceptable. Dulles stated that the US would support free elections only if supervised by the United Nations. In reality Dulles knew Ho would win any election, assuring expansion into Indochina, but the US would not allow this to happen. Conclusion of the Geneva Conference brought an end to French influence in the region and cleared the way for greater US intervention.

The results of the Geneva Conference were not totally satisfactory to the US because the agreement sanctioned Communist gains. Dulles immediately conducted diplomatic maneuvers to counter any further Communist expansion. First, aid was given directly to the South Vietnamese rather than through France. This act meant that the US was now taking over the French role in Indochina. Second, the Geneva settlement was signed between the Viet Minh and France; the US was not a signatory, therefore the US was not bound by agreement. This allowed the US to act freely by ignoring the

mandate for elections and providing military aid. Third, in order to oppose the Ho Chi Minh nationalists, the US brought back Ngo Dinh Diem from his self-imposed exile to take over as Prime Minister of the South Vietnamese government. The US supported Diem and hoped that he could unify the South against Ho Chi Minh. Fourth, the US started to train the South Vietnamese army into an effective fighting force; something the French had failed to do. Finally, Dulles constructed the collective security mechanism he had wanted the entire time by establishing the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Dulles hoped that SEATO would serve as the regional organization that might deter the Communists.

These actions were able to temporarily delay the Communists from taking over all of Vietnam. The US continued to support Diem even though he had turned the government in the South into an oppressive dictatorship. Diem never rallied the people to challenge the nationalism of Ho Chi Minh. The American-trained South Vietnamese Army overthrew Diem in a violent coup in 1963. SEATO never adequately fulfilled the role Dulles hoped as a collective security mechanism for Southeast Asia. The treaty had no real teeth and did not specifically establish Communist expansion as a threat. Several key countries that could have acted as the buffer against the Communists were unable to join because of the 1954 Geneva conference. Even among member nations support was

weak and the conditions for unified action were defined as defense against a general threat to the region.

In the long run the US, like the French, became involved in another costly drawn-out war. Ten years and three Administrations later the US would start down the slippery slope of Vietnam. The Johnson Administration in 1964 knew it was battling Communism but lost sight of the purpose for involvement in Indochina and its relevance to greater US national interests. Dulles's actions from 1954 to 1955 were temporary measures that required consistent follow-up actions by his successors.

#### **E.EVALUATION OF THE EISENHOWER APPROACH**

In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the Eisenhower foreign policy organization, the system worked relatively well. The approach did not screen out critical information from the decision maker. The NSC pointed out the strategic importance of Indochina to US interests in 1950.<sup>46</sup> The Eisenhower NSC spent the first two years reviewing all the Truman NSC papers. In 1953 the NSC again pointed out the significance of Indochina as a buffer against Communist expansion and that the French must be supported in their

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<sup>46</sup>Schulzinger, American Diplomacy, 236.

effort to battle the Viet Minh.<sup>47</sup> The NSC's rigorous analysis process provided the decision maker with as much information as possible in order to make clear the significance of Southeast Asia. But the primary mechanism used in the crisis, Secretary Dulles, screened information to a certain extent filtered by his own interpretation of events. This occurred when the French conceded the northern portion of Vietnam. Dulles protested this action by refusing to return to the conference; in his view any French concessions jeopardized US interests. However Eisenhower did not accept Dulles's view on the concession to partition Vietnam and overrode his Secretary. As pointed out earlier, the two were in constant contact as Dulles kept the President informed. Furthermore, the working relationship was such that Dulles and Eisenhower were candid in their opinions that any essential information was to be passed on to the President. Eisenhower was able to make decisions based upon the best possible information.

Exposure to conflict among the organization's members determines if the decision maker is made aware of different alternatives. Eisenhower was exposed to conflict through security council meetings where he was able to view all sides of an issue. But during the crisis the NSC did not make the daily decisions. In his meetings with Dulles there was little

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 236.



conflict. The danger here is that the President could be misled into believing a problem does not exist when in fact there is a major crisis. This occurred later in 1956 during the Suez Crisis when Dulles reported to Eisenhower that the situation would not become a major problem or possibly lead to war. A degree of conflict between the President and his advisors is required in order to consider alternative options and avoid group thinking or mutual re-enforcement.

The Eisenhower foreign policy organization was able to respond quickly to the crisis in Indochina. As stated previously, the NSC did not have the flexibility to respond to crisis situations. But Secretary Dulles was able to provide the immediate response and was frequently shuttling between the major powers in order to state the US position on the matter. This flexibility allowed the US to influence the outcome of the crisis.

Finally, throughout that crisis alternatives were staffed out and decisions were carefully made. The staff work of the NSC initiated the action taken by Eisenhower; it was the NSC's National Security Memorandum that stated the importance of Southeast Asia to US national security. A possible failure on the part of the NSC lies in not continuing to map out American interests in Indochina. A constant review of the purposes for involvement in Indochina, within the greater strategic context of US interests around the world, could have averted the prolonged American

engagement during the Vietnam War. The NSC was not involved in the planning of possible military intervention during Dien Bien Phu or the early phases of the Geneva Conference; this was left mostly to the State and Defense Departments. In terms of decision making, Eisenhower consulted with several agencies before taking action. The decision not to intervene with operation VULTURE was arrived at after talks not only with Secretary Dulles, the NSC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff but also Congress and the British government. During the Geneva negotiations Eisenhower continued to negotiate with the French on conditions for potential US military intervention. Even the final Geneva agreement required the negotiated "seven-point plan" prior to American approval. Overall the approach allowed for a deliberate examination of the issues prior to making any final decision.

Eisenhower used a modified formalistic approach to organizing his foreign policy apparatus. He created a highly structured hierarchical NSC system to better integrate foreign policy among the major governmental agencies. He further established a relationship with his Secretary of State such that he relied on him to conduct foreign policy. This autonomy allowed Dulles to take action when the situation dictated. The Indochina Crisis illustrates that the formalistic aspects had very little impact on the overall results. Rather it was Eisenhower's use of Dulles that served as the predominant force in the resolution of the crisis. The

contributions of the formalistic aspects, namely the NSC, were in terms of long range planning and threat warning. This was balanced by Dulles, who was able to provide the responsiveness required in a crisis situation. Therefore a formalistic approach can work best if there is another mechanism that can deal with the day-to-day requirements of foreign policy.



### III. THE KENNEDY FOREIGN POLICY ORGANIZATION

Richard Johnson has characterized John F. Kennedy's approach to organizing the US foreign policy machinery as collegial because Kennedy concentrated on managing the personalities of his advisors in order to cultivate a close-knit team that could analyze and resolve foreign policy issues.<sup>48</sup> Kennedy projected the image of a vital and vigorous leader who would re-energize the country in foreign affairs.<sup>49</sup> Kennedy wanted to establish himself as the maker of US foreign policy and gathered trusted confidants around him to achieve this end. Kennedy did not care for formal organization and preferred a more personalized leadership style; lack of structure was perhaps the biggest flaw in the Kennedy foreign policy organization. Kennedy depended upon various task forces and survey missions to manage the Vietnam problem; the use of these devices led to the creation of ad hoc policies rather than effective long term solutions.

President Kennedy preferred a personal style of leadership and relied primarily on a small group of advisers to manage foreign policy. This reliance on close advisers rather than a structured system occurred for several reasons.

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<sup>48</sup>Johnson, *Manging the White House*, 7.

<sup>49</sup>Amos A Jordan, William J. Taylor, Jr., and Lawrence J. Korb, *American National Security Policy and Process* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 90-91.

First, based upon recommendations from the Jackson Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, Kennedy dismantled Eisenhower's NSC structure by first eliminating its support organizations, the Planning Board and Operations Coordinating Board, and then reducing the size of the NSC staff. This resulted in the consolidation of power in the National Security Advisor, making the position a more powerful force in foreign affairs. Second, Kennedy initially entrusted the State Department to carry out his foreign policy objectives but quickly became frustrated with State when it was unable to take action. As Secretary of State, Dean Rusk was a superb technician, but was not the aggressive foreign policy maker that Kennedy seemingly desired from the State Department. Ultimately, Rusk remained a low-key advisor who managed the State Department rather than provide the bold, innovative ideas that Kennedy would have preferred<sup>50</sup>. Finally, the Kennedy Administration's first crisis, the Bay of Pigs debacle, created a lack of trust between the President and the CIA and Joint Chiefs of Staff that persisted for most of Kennedy's tenure. These three factors: absence of the systematic analysis of the NSC, lack of dynamic action from the State Department and a level of distrust caused by the Bay of Pigs disaster, drove Kennedy to rely primarily on his close advisors in conducting foreign affairs. In order to

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<sup>50</sup>Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 271.

better understand Kennedy's collegial approach, we need to analyze his foreign policy organization in terms of these factors.

#### **A. KENNEDY'S NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL**

The transition from the Eisenhower to Kennedy Administrations led to major changes in the American foreign policy apparatus, in particular the National Security Council. One of the major initiators of change was Senator Henry Jackson of Washington State, whose Senate Subcommittee on the National Policy Machinery investigated the Eisenhower NSC. Henry "Scoop" Jackson developed a respected expertise in foreign affairs. In 1959 Jackson delivered a speech at the Naval War College that accused President Eisenhower of mismanaging foreign policy and that the National Security Council was a "dangerously misleading facade." It is ironic that Eisenhower was accused of the same charges that were leveled at the Truman Administration ten years earlier. Jackson was concerned that the processes of the National Security Council were compromising American foreign policy rather than defining optimal solutions. Eisenhower viewed these Congressional hearings as an infringement on his presidential power and at first did not cooperate with the committee. Only after agreement upon the conditions on which officials of Eisenhower's NSC would appear before the

committee did the Eisenhower Administration cooperate with Jackson's subcommittee. But despite the best efforts of Robert Cutler to explain the NSC process, the committee was not convinced. The Committee found that the NSC system was far too bureaucratic to provide the President with meaningful advice; the policy papers created by the Planning Board did not represent actual US policy, but rather were "mere statements of aspiration"<sup>51</sup> and that the interdepartmental coordinating committees, the Planning and Operations Coordinating Boards, were ineffective. The NSC had become a paper-mill that simply produced masses of documents which required continual revision. President-elect Kennedy reviewed the Jackson Committee recommendations and tasked his National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy to reorganize the NSC system accordingly.

As the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy began to rise in political prominence as the National Security Advisor by consolidating the power of the NSC. Bundy, a Yale graduate and lecturer at Harvard, was among the brightest of Kennedy's men; he was considered for the Secretary of State position but was thought too young to take on that role. He refused to take a lesser job at the State Department and was then made the

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<sup>51</sup>"Organizing for National Security," Staff Reports and Recommendations, Vol. 3, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, Committee on Government Operations, U.S. Senate (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961).



National Security Advisor. In temperament and intellect he was well suited to Kennedy's style, perhaps because they had shared a common upbringing. In his new role Bundy assumed "the jobs of no fewer than five senior Eisenhower national-security-staff-aides"<sup>52</sup> which included the Executive Secretary and General Goodpaster's Staff Secretary duties. The incorporation of the major roles did not immediately provide Bundy significant power. Not until several months after the Bay of Pigs incident did the National Security Advisor begin to gain the confidence of the President.

Mac Bundy took his mandate for change from the President and radically altered structure of the NSC. Bundy viewed the Planning Board and the Operations Coordinating Board as "rigid and paper-ridden"<sup>53</sup> and that these interdepartmental organizations were grossly inefficient. Bundy thus eliminated both institutions by combining the planning and operations process into a single entity. Bundy then reduced the size of the NSC staff and organized the remaining staff to cover specific regions.<sup>54</sup> The elimination of the Planning Board meant that the formal process of creating policy papers was also terminated. Policy papers were replaced by National

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<sup>52</sup>Destler, *Own Worst Enemy*, 183.

<sup>53</sup>Bromley K. Smith, *Organizational History of the National Security Council during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations*, Monograph written for the National Security Council, November 1988, 9.

<sup>54</sup>Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 102.

Security Action Memorandums (NSAM), authored primarily by Bundy, which covered a whole host of topics from instructions to various agencies, presidential requests for information and definitive policy statements.<sup>55</sup> Finally, during the Kennedy tenure the number of NSC meeting was drastically reduced from Eisenhower's time. During the first four years of his Administration, Eisenhower attended 115 meetings of the Council, most of which he chaired himself.<sup>56</sup> During Kennedy's first two years he attended thirty-one meetings until October of 1962<sup>57</sup>. The smaller number of NSC meetings simply reflected Kennedy's dislike for formal meetings and a greater reliance on more personal inter-action with his advisors.

The dismantling of the Eisenhower NSC served to establish Kennedy's presence as the new President. The new NSC was smaller, more flexible and far more responsive to Kennedy's needs, but there were costs to this new structure. First, combining the planning and operations function would require the NSC to be more involved in actual operations. Rather than maintaining its advisory role established in the previous two administrations, the National Security Advisor and the NSC would become policy advocates. Second,

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<sup>55</sup>Smith, *Organizational History*, 23.

<sup>56</sup>Robert Cutler, *The Development of the National Security Council, Foreign Affairs* 34, 1956. 441-458.

<sup>57</sup>Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 106.

eliminating the Planning Board process put an end to maintaining a sort of corporate knowledge. The Eisenhower NSC papers served not only to define America's position on national security issues but also acted as a "reservoir" of foreign policy guidance. Focusing on the point that the NSC only served as a paper mill misses its greater purpose altogether. Third, the NSC served as a forum for the integration of political military affairs; issues could be argued, the President would make a determination and every major player involved knew the US position and thus could direct his agency towards achieving that end. If a structure like Eisenhower's NSC had existed during President Johnson's Administration, then LBJ could have reappraised American involvement in Vietnam more critically.<sup>58</sup> The responsibilities that the Kennedy NSC had given up were to be taken up by the State Department.

#### **B. SECRETARY OF STATE DEAN RUSK**

Kennedy wanted his Secretary of State to be his primary advisor on foreign affairs and for the State Department to "take charge" and conduct foreign policy. Kennedy selected

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<sup>58</sup>Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers*, (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 89. The authors suggest that had Johnson's staff been more rigorous in analyzing historic analogies then Johnson would have been forced to directly confront the Vietnam crisis rather than delay a solution.

Dean Rusk who was a quiet, thoughtful and hard working man. A former Rhodes scholar, he served as an infantry officer in China and Burma during World War II. After the war he joined the State Department and worked for President Truman as the Under Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. Rusk was certainly well qualified in terms of experience, but there were three factors that prevented him from becoming the Secretary of State that Kennedy wanted.

First, Rusk believed that it was up to the President to establish foreign policy and that the Secretary supported the President. Rusk viewed his role as solely an advisor to the President, not an advocate of policy; he would help the President analyze foreign policy issues but not promote a solution. Kennedy fully supported Rusk but would have preferred if his Secretary of State "would assert himself more boldly, recommend solutions more explicitly, offer imaginative alternatives to Pentagon plans more frequently and govern the Department of State more vigorously."<sup>59</sup> Another factor that worked against Rusk were the appointments of the Under Secretary positions at State. Kennedy had placed his own men in these positions rather than allowing Rusk to build his own team. This meant that these appointees were loyal to Kennedy and not to Rusk. Kennedy would consult directly these Under Secretaries, thus circumventing Rusk. Finally, even

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<sup>59</sup>Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 271.

though Kennedy clearly stated that he would rely on the Secretary of State for managing foreign affairs, there were many other advisors the President would consult. General Maxwell Taylor, UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, Ambassador Averell Harriman and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. were among the few who provided Kennedy with alternative sources of information and advice. This competition reduced the influence and primacy of Secretary Rusk. Under Eisenhower Secretary Dulles guarded his close ties with the President by pushing out other potential advisers. Dean Rusk's quiet demeanor would not let him become an aggressive Secretary of State. Kennedy was never satisfied with the performance of the State Department and his dissatisfaction increased immensely after the Bay of Pigs.

### **C. THE BAY OF PIGS**

The Bay of Pigs invasion significantly affected the manner in which President Kennedy conducted foreign policy for the rest of his tenure. The operation was started during the Eisenhower Administration by the CIA and briefed to Kennedy while he was President-elect. The concept was to land a brigade of fourteen hundred Cuban exiles who would then battle Fidel Castro's forces, overthrow the dictator and liberate the island. Briefings from CIA director Allen Dulles and CIA Deputy Director for Planning Richard Bissel,

along with assurances from the Joint Chiefs of Staff guaranteeing success, swayed Kennedy to approve the plan. But Kennedy made the stipulation that US forces could not provide overt support to the Cuban exiles, otherwise the US would violate its own policy and international law by openly intervening in another country. Such actions would not only bring international condemnation upon the US, but possibly precipitate hostile responses from the Soviets in Berlin. Based upon the advice of the CIA and Joint Chiefs, Kennedy went ahead with the plan. On April 17, 1961 the landing took place. Initially the brigade fought well and inflicted heavy casualties against a twenty thousand man Cuban force. Unfortunately, due to a lack of supplies and air support, the brigade was eventually overrun and captured by Castro's forces. The incident became an embarrassment to the US when it could not hide American support of the operation. Kennedy "was aghast at his own stupidity, angry at having been badly advised by some and let down by others."<sup>60</sup> But he alone made the final decision to go ahead with the invasion and took full responsibility for its failure.

The decision making process that approved the Bay of Pigs invasion was flawed and should have either taken steps to ensure the operation was conducted without implicating the US or canceled the invasion altogether. The failure of the

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<sup>60</sup>Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 295.

operation can be attributed to fact that the Kennedy Administration had just taken reigns of power and had not been confident enough to question the feasibility of the invasion. The plan was initiated by the previous administration and advocated strongly by the CIA director. Kennedy trusted the estimates of Dulles and Bissel and though both men were hold-overs from the previous administration, they had highly regarded reputations. To his own fault Kennedy did not seriously question or challenge the validity of the chances for the operation's success. The manner in which the plan was presented to Kennedy placed the President in a poor political position; if he failed to take immediate action, then the Castro regime could not be defeated in the future because it would be too strong. Further, it would make Kennedy appear weak on Communism by denying the Cuban exiles their attempt to retake their homeland. Kennedy believed that his requirement for no overt US assistance would be taken into account by the CIA and the Cuban brigade. The key members of Kennedy's own foreign policy team did not oppose the plan. The NSC and the State Department failed to critically examine the political ramifications of such an operation, while the Defense Department did not evaluate the military feasibility of such an operation. The incident served as a wake-up call to the entire administration that changes needed to be made to its foreign policy machinery.

The major lesson to be learned from the Bay of Pigs was that the President needed to be more fully engaged in foreign affairs. He would not repeat the same mistake of the Bay of Pigs again. The President needed people he could trust to help him manage foreign affairs. He would concentrate on developing personal ties with his advisors before trusting the established governmental structure to manage foreign policy. Kennedy had taken apart the foreign policy mechanisms that previously existed, which was his prerogative, but he replaced it with another mechanism that did not live up to his expectations. Kennedy's only course of action then was to depend upon his close advisors.

Overall the Kennedy Administration certainly lacked the structure present in the previous administration. This suited Kennedy just fine, even though the collegial approach took up much of his time, required him to manage conflict among his advisors, and guide the work of the group towards a solution. This approach was most successful during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the threat was defined and imminent; all advisors involved realized that national survival was at stake and a dedicated collegial effort towards finding a peaceful resolution was required. But the missile crisis of October 1962 presented a unique situation. When this collegial approach was applied to the problems of Vietnam, the outcomes were not as successful, despite the best efforts of Kennedy and his men.



Kennedy's Vietnam policy is illustrative of his collegial approach. Almost every decision he made with regard to US policy towards Vietnam was made on the basis of recommendations from his advisors and rarely at any sort of formal meeting. This method served to produce temporary solutions that resolved immediate issues. But in the long run the immediate responses did not address the fundamental problems and forced America to commit its national capital into a war that should not have been fought.

The danger of the collegial approach is that it can inadvertently lead to incremental responses rather than development of long term policies. The various task forces and survey missions Kennedy used to analyze the Vietnam problem developed immediate short-term solutions. By their very nature, task forces and survey missions are created to deal with a specific situation, once they have completed their report the group is disbanded. Any long range objectives were noted but could not be pursued adequately because the task force or mission that recommended the solution no longer existed to follow-up on the issue. This leads to another problem with the collegial approach: accountability for the decisions of the group. Since this approach relies on a great deal of personal interaction between subordinates and the decision maker, the responsibility for a solution tends to rest upon the group. The fault here is that there can be mutual support within the group for a poor solution; in such

an instance everyone is to blame, but there is no one held accountable.

#### **D.THE VIETNAM DILEMMA 1961-1963**

John Kennedy did not have a specific plan to deal with the Vietnam problem. When he assumed the Presidency his foreign policy agenda included dealing with the Soviet Union, Cuba, Berlin, Laos, the Congo and Nuclear Testing. Vietnam was certainly an important problem related to the larger issue of Communism, but it was viewed as simply another item on the list with which to contend.

Kennedy's views remained consistent as to American interest in Vietnam and the commitment of US troops to the region. As a senator in 1954 he supported the French cause in Indochina but did not want to send American combat troops into a fight to save Dien Bien Phu. In 1956 he restated the "domino principle" that Vietnam was vital to preventing Communist expansion into the rest of Southeast Asia. In late 1961 he continued to believe that US forces should not be engaged in combat in Southeast Asia. Once Kennedy was President he tried to delay for as long as possible any deployment of US ground forces into Vietnam. Kennedy maintained the middle ground between total war and not losing Vietnam; "his essential contribution...was both to raise our

commitment and to keep it limited."<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, this approach to solving the Vietnam dilemma did not well serve American objectives in Southeast Asia.

The Kennedy Administration continued the Eisenhower Administration policy of supporting South Vietnam against a possible Communist take-over. The objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to the Communists was never questioned; Kennedy and his Administration viewed the Communist take-over of Southeast Asia as a major threat to the national security of the United States and required America to take a stand in the region by supporting South Vietnam. Vietnam was a vital interest and worth staking US national prestige in order to keep South Vietnam free from Communism. But Kennedy also stated that it was Vietnam's war to win or lose, which meant that the US would not defend Vietnam at all costs; it was up to the Vietnamese to determine their own fate. In reality Diem and South Vietnam could not win without American support and this fact placed US policy in a quandary. The Kennedy Administration assumed that through the use of military force, either the South Vietnamese army or the US military, that its strategic objectives could be achieved. This policy ignored or minimized the fact that South Vietnam required a stable government in order to oppose the threat from the North; otherwise no amount of military effort would be to

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<sup>61</sup>Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 652.

purpose. The US continued to support Diem despite his inability to establish a stable government, and only after he no longer could support American objectives for Vietnam did the US abandon him.

Kennedy's collegial approach is evident in dealing with the problems caused by Vietnam. He would rely on the advice of his advisers in order to make his decisions; the result was a series of temporary solutions with no serious debate about American purposes in Vietnam. Kennedy's actions to deal with the Vietnamese dilemma can be divided into two phases. The first phase occurred during the first two years of his Administration, when he tried to grapple with such issues while taking care not to get America too involved in the war. The second phase involved the decisions to back the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem. Kennedy's short-term solutions during his abbreviated tenure, along with his radical alteration of the foreign policy apparatus, would later become detrimental to Lyndon Johnson as America slowly sank into the quagmire which became "Vietnam".

Kennedy realized that the South Vietnam situation was serious and could turn into a far greater crisis. The war was not going well for the South, and Diem's inability to create a stable government was punctuated by a coup attempt in November of 1960. The fall of Diem seemed imminent, and with it, American prestige and strategic objectives for Southeast Asia. Kennedy tried to take steps early on in his

administration to resolve the problem. In January 1961 he approved the Counter Insurgency Plan (CIP) which increased the size of the ARVN and provided equipment and training to the Civil Guard in order to better deal with the war. In the same month he was given a report written by General Edward Lansdale that stated the situation was getting worse and required additional US assistance or risk losing Vietnam. Lansdale was a CIA operative who had helped Diem defeat his political enemies and consolidate power in 1954. The report served to jar Kennedy to take more vigorous action and led to the establishment of the Gilpatric Task Force. Rosewell Gilpatric was the Deputy Secretary of Defense and his group was ordered to study measures to save Vietnam. The Task Force recommended that the CIP effort be stepped up with further increases in the size to the ARVN forces; the report also pointed out that steps needed to be taken to resolve South Vietnam's internal security problem. The final Gilpatric Report "advised making explicit a firm commitment to do whatever would be necessary to defend South Vietnam."<sup>62</sup> The State Department, which assumed control over the task force, took this commitment to mean additional US forces. The State Department redrafted the report with the references to "commitment" removed and turned it into NSAM 52. This

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<sup>62</sup>Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1979), 72.

document defined the US purpose in Vietnam as supporting the South Vietnamese but more importantly did not commit anymore resources than already promised by the Kennedy Administration.

President Kennedy never seemed to have a firm grasp on the situation in Vietnam nor did he have enough information on which to base his decisions. He repeatedly sent survey missions to Vietnam in order to get a first-hand assessment. But these missions tended to interview the same people and never uncovered the true nature of the problem. One of the first of these missions was the May 1961 Lyndon Johnson tour of the Far East. In an attempt to demonstrate US support and bolster Diem, the Vice President hailed the South Vietnamese leader as the Winston Churchill of Asia. Johnson realized this was a gross overstatement but simply reflected the Administration's view that Diem was "the only boy we got out there."<sup>63</sup> In June of 1961 another survey team, headed by Eugene Staley of the Stanford Research Institute, went to Vietnam to assess the economic situation. This group's results focused more on the economics of sustaining ARVN force levels rather than the economic development of the country.<sup>64</sup> The most significant of the early survey missions occurred in October 1961 and was led by the President's

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<sup>63</sup>Karnow, *Vietnam*, 230.

<sup>64</sup>*The Pentagon Papers: The Department of Defense History of the United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam* (Boston: Beacon Press), Vol.2, 62-64.

military advisor Maxwell Taylor. After this survey mission the Kennedy Administration would become divided over how to deal with Vietnam, and American commitment would deepen.

The Taylor mission was important because it suggested to Kennedy that the US deploy its own forces to demonstrate its resolve in keeping South Vietnam Communist-free. Maxwell Taylor was the quintessential intellectual warrior and a man whom John Kennedy could trust. The President turned to Taylor to investigate the failure at the Bay of Pigs and made Taylor the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in 1962. But in late 1961 Kennedy wanted Taylor to determine "courses of action...to avoid a further deterioration of the situation in South Vietnam."<sup>65</sup> The President further stipulated: "In your assessment you should bear in mind that the initial responsibility for the effective maintenance of the independence of South Vietnam rests with the people and government of that country."<sup>66</sup> Placing Taylor in charge of a major survey mission without any equally high ranking State Department member reflected the weakness of that department and Kennedy's continued emphasis on military solutions.

In two weeks Taylor and his team traveled throughout Vietnam gathering information from personal interviews and observations. The mission concluded that the situation in

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<sup>65</sup>Maxwell Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972), 225.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 225.

Vietnam was serious, but with US assistance in the form of a "limited partnership", South Vietnam could overcome these problems. Taylor made several recommendations, the major one being the deployment of an 8,000-man logistics battalion to assist with disaster relief in the Mekong Delta. Other recommendations included providing additional advisors and training, building up the local guard and to re-evaluate the US economic assistance program. But the logistics battalion recommendation brought the most attention because it committed US forces. Taylor warned the President of the risks such a deployment would entail; such a move could lead to greater involvement and increased tensions. But the size of the US force could provide the President with some political flexibility and send a message to the Viet Minh, as well as to the South Vietnamese, that America was serious about its commitments to South Vietnam.

The Taylor recommendation drew serious criticisms from the Defense and State Departments. McNamara evaluated the force to be too small and that a 200,000 man presence would be required to make any difference in the war effort. He warned that a clearly defined commitment to preventing the fall of South Vietnam could not be achieved without the introduction of US forces into the war.<sup>67</sup> Secretary Rusk believed that Vietnam was "a simple military problem,

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<sup>67</sup>Prados, *Keepers*, 127.



amenable to a military solution."<sup>68</sup> He did not approve of a wider US commitment of troops but supported providing military assistance to the Vietnamese. Rusk and McNamara presented the President a memorandum proposing the US make "the decision to commit ourselves to the objective of preventing the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communism and that, in doing so, we recognize that the introduction of United States and other SEATO forces *may be necessary* to achieve this objective."<sup>69</sup> In essence, the memorandum recommended taking specific actions to militarily support the South Vietnamese and to explicitly define American intentions in the region to the international community. Kennedy accepted the recommendations, again with the exception of committing the US to preventing the fall of the South, and in November 1961 turned the memorandum into NSAM 111 entitled "First Phase of Vietnam Program."<sup>70</sup> Kennedy could now provide military support to South Vietnam without committing the US to a war and could defer a decision on sending American troops until later.<sup>71</sup>

By the end of 1961 Kennedy had developed a course of action for American policy in Vietnam. He selected a path

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>69</sup>Pentagon Papers, Vol.2, 113. Italics added.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 116.

between sending US forces to fight in Vietnam and abandoning Southeast Asia altogether. The President was able to solve the immediate problems without deepening the US military commitment; arrival of military aid was able to forestall the defeat of Diem in the South. Perhaps Kennedy believed he bought time to resolve the Vietnamese dilemma in the future. But delaying the resolution would not achieve US purposes in Vietnam; making the ARVN a more effective fighting force through training and reorganization would not create an effective South Vietnamese government.

During 1961 and 1962 Kennedy had received indications that South Vietnam had serious political problems that would threaten American purposes in Vietnam unless they were dealt with. All attempts at political reforms were unsuccessful due for the most part to Diem's refusal to change. From 1954 to 1961 the Eisenhower Administration pursued a strategy of repeatedly pressuring Diem into making reforms. But Diem learned that he could delay or ignore American demands because he knew that the US would only support him. Diem may have been a sincere Vietnamese nationalist, but he was going to rule the South on *his* terms and *not* as a Western style democracy. On several occasions Kennedy had been warned of such political problems. During the October 1961 Taylor mission other members of the team noted a general

dissatisfaction among the population with Diem.<sup>72</sup> Taylor himself heard complaints from the Commanding General of the Field Command about Diem's performance."<sup>73</sup> At Kennedy's request Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith went to Vietnam to evaluate the situation for the President. The Ambassador's determination was bleak: "no reform was possible unless the United States got rid of Diem."<sup>74</sup> Finally, in 1962 Senator Mike Mansfield pointed out Diem's shortcomings, discovered during his survey mission, and that the US needed to reassess its interests in Vietnam.<sup>75</sup> But Kennedy did not pay any serious heed to the deteriorating political situation. Perhaps the US did not strongly emphasize reforms, in part, so as not to alienate Diem but also not to accelerate his downfall. For the rest of 1961 and all of 1962 America continued to concentrate on a military solution to Vietnam without entangling US forces; any attempts at achieving a political solution were feeble efforts at best.

Kennedy's temporary solution wore out by mid-1963 and he now had to face the political problem. For a short time after the delivery of additional US aid, the war went fairly well; even by McNamara's quantifiable factors the US was winning in

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<sup>72</sup>Karnow, *Vietnam*, 269.

<sup>73</sup>Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 234.

<sup>74</sup>Gelb with Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*, 87.

<sup>75</sup>Karnow, *Vietnam*, 285.

1962.<sup>76</sup> But due to lack of progress with political and economic reforms and growing civil unrest, Diem's regime was again threatened with collapse. The situation did not come to a head until May 1963, when Diem's governmental attacks upon Buddhist protesters at Hue drew harsh criticism from Washington. Protests against Diem's repression intensified when the Buddhist monk campaign of self-immolations began in June. Ambassador Frederick Nolting urged Diem to reconcile with the Buddhists, but Diem only made minor concessions and insisted that the Viet Cong were responsible for the attacks. Any credibility Diem had built towards coming to terms with the Buddhists was destroyed when his government launched attacks against their Pagodas on August 21, 1963. The incident served to prompt Kennedy Administration officials into taking actions that would lead to Diem's downfall.

In June 1963 Kennedy had named Henry Cabot Lodge to take over Nolting's job as Ambassador. Lodge was the Republican Vice Presidential nominee who ran against Kennedy in 1960, and his appointment was considered a politically deft move. The pagoda attacks occurred while Lodge was in Hawaii receiving intelligence briefs from CINCPAC; he was ordered by Washington to leave immediately for Saigon to get control of the situation. Upon his arrival Lodge was briefed on the

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<sup>76</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company: 1965), 549.

events and that Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem's brother, and his special forces were responsible for the attacks and not the South Vietnamese Army, as had been reported by the Voice of America. Lodge reported that responsibility for the attacks belonged to Nhu and that Diem probably approved. He also noted that several ARVN generals had made queries about US support if they launched a coup against Diem.

In Washington, State Department and White House officials George Ball, Averell Harriman, Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal quickly drafted a controversial cable in response to the attacks. In effect the message stated that the US did not approve of the attacks against the Buddhists, that Nhu could no longer remain in power, and Diem should be given the opportunity to get rid of his brother himself: if "Diem remains obdurant and refuses, then we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved."<sup>77</sup> Further, that the US would stop economic and military support if Diem did not take action to remove Nhu. Lodge was to also notify the ARVN generals plotting the coup that they would have US support.<sup>78</sup> Lodge received the cable enthusiastically, fully supported its intentions and took steps to implement it immediately.

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<sup>77</sup>Pentagon Papers, Vol.2, 235.

<sup>78</sup>Karnow, Vietnam, 303.

The controversy about the cable occurred over the manner in which it was approved for transmission to Lodge. The message was drafted over a weekend when the President and his principal senior advisors were all out of town. The drafters were able to get ahold of the President and several advisors to brief them on the contents of the cable; each member apparently understood the contents of the message because they gave their approval to release the cable to Lodge. Only after the cable was sent did the President and his advisors realize its significance and begin to have second thoughts about supporting a coup. This initiated a series of heated NSC meetings the following week to discuss a new policy approach.

The NSC meetings of late August 1963 centered around whether the US should continue to support Diem or support a coup against him. The President's advisors were divided over a new course of action and struggled to find an answer. The State Department voiced concerns that Diem's persecution of the Buddhists had alienated any remaining popular support he had within the country and that American policy objectives were at an end while Diem was in power. The Defense Department pushed for continued support of Diem since he was the only person strong enough to lead South Vietnam in the war against the North. Kennedy received the personal assessments of Ambassador Lodge and the commander of the military advisory group, General Paul Harkin; they were also

split in their views, Lodge wanting to back the coup while Harkin wanted to give Diem one more chance. Kennedy asked for Ambassador Nolting's opinion; Nolting, who had cultivated a trusting relationship with Diem, urged that the US continue to support him. But Under Secretary Averell Harriman strongly disagreed and "felt that Nolting had been profoundly wrong all along in his advice to 'go along' with Diem."<sup>79</sup> On two occasions Kennedy went so far as to go around to each advisor and ask his assessment of the situation. In the end each side argued the alternatives and agreed the US could not ignore the pagoda attacks, but the NSC could not come up with a solution.

Kennedy's indecisive Vietnam policy had painted his Administration into a corner by limiting its options. Kennedy decided on the most politically acceptable route and sought methods by which to pressure Diem into changing his policies; this was simply a continuation of the old approach. Kennedy also had to deal with the coup. He authorized Lodge to suspend American aid when he deemed it necessary and to tell the generals that they would get US support only if they revealed their plans. On August 31 the generals called off the coup because they were unsure about US intentions and they could not secure control of the Saigon military

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<sup>79</sup>Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy*, (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc. 1967), 492.

district. Thus the NSC meetings of the previous four days had turned out to be in vain. This entire incident is most telling of the Kennedy Administration and how it dealt with the Vietnam dilemma; it required a serious threat to a major strategic objective for the Kennedy's foreign policy team to even begin a search for alternative strategies to their flawed Vietnam policy.

From September to October of 1963 the Kennedy Administration tried to forge a new Vietnam policy, but the best the US could do was to pursue old strategies. Kennedy said of US efforts: "We are using our influence...to persuade the government there to take those steps which will win back support. That takes some time and we must be patient, we must persist."<sup>80</sup> America again tried to make it clear to Diem that the US could not tolerate his treatment of the Buddhists and that he must reform if he was to enjoy continued US support. Diem did not change because he viewed the Buddhist protests as a threat to his government; his objectives had diverged from America's and he would do whatever was required to remain in power. The US plan was to carry out a series of "graduated pressures" in the form of restricting economic assistance and continuing a dialogue with Diem to encourage

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<sup>80</sup>Weldon A. Brown, *Prelude to Disaster: The American Role in Vietnam 1940-1963*, (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1975), 211.



him to reform. Meanwhile the generals were regrouping for another coup attempt.

The Kennedy Administration was confused over the status of the coup and never committed to a definitive position on whether to support or oppose it. Kennedy tried to place the US in a position where it would benefit from a coup but not incur any of the costs if one failed. On October 5 Kennedy cabled Lodge, assuming the coup was off, that "no initiative should now be taken to give any covert encouragement to a coup. There should, however, be an urgent effort...to identify and build contact with possible alternative leadership as and when it appears."<sup>81</sup> The generals plotting the coup wanted confirmation of US support. On October 6 Washington stated in another cable that the US would not "thwart a change of government or deny economic and military assistance to a new regime."<sup>82</sup> The generals took this to be a vote of confidence for the coup and set the date for the 1st of November.

Even after making statements to the effect the US would not take preventive action against the coup, the Kennedy Administration continued to waiver in its decision. Mac Bundy was worried about the chances of success: the US "should not be in a position of thwarting a coup, we would

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<sup>81</sup>Karnow, *Vietnam*, 310. Also see *Pentagon Papers*, Vol.2, 257, for portion of actual message to Lodge.

<sup>82</sup>*Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 2, 257.

like to have the option of judging and warning on any plan with poor prospects."<sup>83</sup> Not knowing the coup plan troubled the administration, General Harkin, a Diem supporter, stirred the pot by sending several messages to Maxwell Taylor that opposed the coup and gave it little chance of success.<sup>84</sup> Lodge countered with the fact that the coup was imminent and that any change in the South Vietnamese government would be in the best interests of the US. Right up until the end, the Kennedy Administration waffled; they wanted to retain the ability to stop the coup and yet not be involved in the coup itself. This lack of decisiveness and fear of taking risks was symptomatic of the entire Vietnam policy and would eventually lead America into a costly war.

The coup started in the late morning of November 1 with the seizure of several governmental buildings in Saigon. Diem and Nhu eluded rebel forces at the palace and were on the run for most of the day. The brothers were finally captured at a Catholic church. On their way to the Vietnamese Joint General Staff they were murdered in an armored personnel carrier. The news of the assassination apparently shocked Kennedy and his advisors. A new government formed on November 5 and by November 8 had received US recognition. By late November NSAM 273 was drafted and restated US purposes

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<sup>83</sup>Karnow, *Vietnam*, 314.

<sup>84</sup>*Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 2, 220.

in Vietnam were "to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy."<sup>85</sup> The US then provided the new South Vietnamese government with military and economic aid at the same levels as the Diem regime and encouraged a renewed vigorous campaign against the Communists. Now with Diem out of the way, the focus could return to getting on with the business of fighting the war. After Diem there would be a succession of Generals who tried to govern and were eventually overthrown themselves; ultimately no effective government would emerge in South Vietnam until the fall of Saigon in 1975.

John F. Kennedy was assassinated three weeks after Diem, and Lyndon Johnson ascended to the Chief Executive position. Johnson inherited the legacy of a dead man - this included an administration not of his choosing and Vietnam. The foreign policy organization created by Kennedy was not suited to Johnson's style and LBJ struggled to manage Kennedy's men. Johnson simply continued Kennedy's policies and put the Vietnam issue on hold until after the 1964 national elections. Once elected on his own merits, Johnson tried to deal with Vietnam using the Kennedy collegial approach and only succeeded in getting America deeper into a war it could not win. The formalistic mechanisms created during the

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<sup>85</sup>*Pentagon Papers*, 276.

Eisenhower Administration would have benefited Lyndon Johnson. This would have been no guarantee that increased American involvement would not have occurred, but it would have forced the President to face the problem directly, understand the fundamental issues, and make him think critically before committing American prestige and resources to an unattainable cause.

#### **E.EVALUATION OF THE KENNEDY APPROACH**

Overall, despite its failure to face the Vietnam dilemma head-on, the Kennedy foreign policy organization fulfilled most of the criteria. First, the degree to which Kennedy's collegial approach screened out vital information was dependent upon how much Kennedy trusted his advisors assessments. Kennedy received his information through intelligence cables from the White House Situation Room and from first-hand accounts of his envoys. He sent multiple survey missions into Vietnam to examine the problem. Despite the inherent problems of these survey missions, they were the primary source that provided Kennedy with a picture of the problem. The President received a variety of reports, from Taylor's positive evaluation of the crisis to the negative reports from Galbraith and Mansfield which, in sum, represented the entire scope of the Vietnam problem. Given the diversity of the reports, any distortion occurred in

Kennedy's own mind, since he ultimately had to sort the information for himself. Perhaps the problem lay in the differing reports. On one occasion the Krulak-Mendenhall mission of September 1963 returned with opposite views of the crisis. Kennedy was to have remarked to the envoys: "You two did visit the same country, didn't you?"<sup>86</sup>

Kennedy was exposed to substantive conflict, but the arguments were focused over the manner in which to support the military effort in Vietnam. The Taylor report raised legitimate questions about the cost of increased involvement. The State and Defense department were at odds over the consequences of deploying US forces into the region. But Rusk and McNamara were able to compromise and develop NSAM 111 which allowed the President to postpone the decision to send US forces. The meetings of late August 1963 provided several instances for Kennedy to witness the conflict among his advisors. The cable of 24 August was a source of conflict. The verbal exchange between Nolting and Harriman was another. There was also conflict between Ambassador Lodge and the Senior Military Advisor, General Harkin. In each instance Kennedy selected the middle ground - a solution that would diffuse the internal administration conflict. Each of these incidents served to illustrate the frustration the

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<sup>86</sup>Karnow, Vietnam, 309.

Vietnam policy had caused and should have been a signal that the US needed a major policy review.

The Kennedy Administration's responsiveness depended upon the urgency of the problem. In the case of Vietnam, the initial decisions to provide Diem additional support without committing US forces required almost a year of repeated survey missions and fact finding before Kennedy decided upon an acceptable solution. Kennedy concentrated on allowing the Vietnamese to fight the war and that the US would only provide the means. He knew that the South Vietnamese had political problems but believed that Diem could work them out eventually. He did not want to involve US forces and tried to delay their possible introduction for as long as possible. But in not addressing the political problems of the South more forcefully, Kennedy only delayed the inevitable deployment of US forces in support of the greater objective within Southeast Asia: the containment of Communism. In terms of responsiveness to the coup, only after senior officials had drafted the contentious cable of August 24 did the Kennedy Administration take serious action to deal with Diem, other than to urge him to change his ways. Immediately after the coup was called off on 31 August 1963, the Administration tried to formulate a new policy. Each member of the NSC had strong views and expressed them, but there was a hesitancy to take decisive action. The Kennedy foreign policy organization responded quickly to the problem, but the nature of the

response tended to be reactive; even after the recognition of a problem, Kennedy's advisors were unable to find a solution.

Finally, alternative courses of action were never staffed out because there was no real staff dedicated to this purpose. The senior advisors who made up the NSC had become their own staff and researched the problems with their first hand survey missions. In all their meetings over Vietnam, the Kennedy Administration only addressed the problem of how to better fight the Communists and not whether the preventing the fall of Vietnam was really important to US national security. On two occasions the issue of whether the US should seriously consider extricating itself from Vietnam was brought up for discussion. During the August 31, 1963 NSC meeting Paul Kattenburg, a State Department expert on Vietnam, suggested that Diem's continued presence would force the US out of Vietnam and that it was now an opportunity to "get out honorably."<sup>87</sup> Kattenburg's idea was dismissed as absurd and not an option. During the September 6 meeting of the NSC Robert Kennedy made a comment along Kattenburg's line of thinking that if no South Vietnamese government could fight the Communists, perhaps the US should "get out now, permanently and finally."<sup>88</sup> There wasn't enough information available to answer Robert Kennedy's question and McNamara

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 308.

<sup>88</sup>Brown, *Prelude to Disaster*, 209.

suggested sending a mission to Vietnam to find out.<sup>89</sup> In both instances the idea was not fully explored because it was considered antithetical to American strategic objectives for Southeast Asia.

In view of its treatment of the Vietnam dilemma, the Kennedy Administration's collegial approach was unsuccessful in preventing the eventual escalation and commitment of American forces. Kennedy helped to bring the problems upon himself when he authorized the changes in the Eisenhower NSC without seriously considering its usefulness. The failure of the State Department to "take charge" of foreign policy also played a major role. The result was a compromised policy - a charge the Kennedy team had leveled at Eisenhower During the 1960 election campaign. In the end Kennedy's Vietnam policy was convoluted and contradictory and his organizational approach was a contributing factor. Failure in Vietnam was not solely due to the collegial approach but more accurately a lack of adherence to any formalistic mechanisms.

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 209.



#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Organization cannot make a genius out of an incompetent. On the other hand, disorganization can scarcely fail to result in inefficiency."<sup>90</sup>

- Dwight David Eisenhower

Richard Johnson's framework serves as a point of departure for the analysis of Presidential organization. The original application of the framework in *Managing the White House* did not fully take into account that Presidents can use more than one type of approach; it tended to assume that only one particular approach was utilized while others were ignored. But Johnson's framework does implicitly suggest there is a strong relationship between an Administration's organization and the types of policies it can create. This thesis has demonstrated, based upon the framework, that a direct relationship existed between the manner in which the US foreign policy apparatus was structured during the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations, and the types of policy outputs that were produced. A fundamental change in the structure can lead to a change in the types of foreign policy the President is able to create.

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<sup>90</sup>Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), 87.

The alteration in the US foreign policy machinery between the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations was a major contributing factor to the escalation of American involvement in Southeast Asia by 1964. The NSC under Eisenhower was the one organization whose responsibility was to focus on specific issues as well as to coordinate and integrate policy, that could have pointed out the flaws in the Kennedy approach to Vietnam. But this structure was dismantled because of partisan politics and a desire on the part of the President to re-invent/re-invigorate foreign policy. This alone would not have been a problem had the subsequent foreign policy organization created by the Kennedy Administration been able to fill the void left by the NSC. Through a combination of mistrust on the part of Kennedy and Dean Rusk's personal demeanor, the State Department was inadequate to the task of managing foreign policy. Instead there was a greater reliance on advisors who advocated military solutions rather than diplomatic ones. Whether or not Kennedy would have extracted the US from Vietnam after the 1964 election is unclear. What is known for sure, and examined by this work is that the foreign policy apparatus that existed when Lyndon Johnson assumed power was unmanageable by him and led to wider escalation of the war. This is the major drawback of the collegial system: it requires a leader who can manage personalities. Once that leader is gone, the organization cannot hope to function

optimally. The collegial system then needs support from another approach to counter this flaw, and it lies in utilizing the formalistic approach.

As the Eisenhower and Kennedy examples illustrate, there are benefits and costs to utilizing each approach. The formalistic approach allows for a systematic analysis of an issue and for continuity when the decision maker is incapacitated or turning over to a successor. But this approach generally requires time in order to research an issue and develop solutions; it is ill-suited to dealing with immediate problems. There is also a danger that if the system is not monitored, its processes can screen out and distort vital information before it reaches the decision-maker.

The greatest strength of the collegial approach is that it can respond quickly to crisis situations. Since this approach encourages teamwork among subordinates and minimizes conflict, solutions can be determined in short order. However, this approach requires a decision maker to be able to manage his subordinates in order to keep the group's effort focused upon the issue. This approach also demands a great deal of time from the decision maker.

Given these characteristics, the formalistic and collegial approaches are complimentary to one another. One provides for systematic analysis, long term planning, and integration of governmental policies while the other gives

the decision maker a device to be utilized for the daily problems caused by foreign affairs. The best method for managing foreign policy might then be to find a balance between the two approaches.

Both Kennedy and Eisenhower utilized their respective approaches as best they could manage. This thesis concludes that Dwight D. Eisenhower was better able to find a balance between these approaches than John F. Kennedy. The Eisenhower Administration tended to be formalistic but also utilized collegial mechanisms. The formalistic aspects were predominant within the National Security Council, which was appropriate given its purpose of policy examination and integration. It was the NSC that prompted Eisenhower to respond in the instance of Dien Bien Phu by defining Indochina as a vital interest to the US. The NSC process not only codified US interests in the region, through the development of policy papers, but also continually reviewed and updated policy. It was this system that came under attack by Senator Jackson when his subcommittee pointed out all the weaknesses and flaws of such a mechanism. His subcommittee's findings played down the advantages of such a system, left the general impression that the NSC was the sole organization Eisenhower used to manage foreign policy, and that this organization was totally inadequate. Jackson seized upon this idea when he urged President Kennedy to change the NSC system and role.

As has been pointed out earlier, the NSC was not the only input into Eisenhower's decision making process; there was also a great reliance on Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Dulles served as the maker of foreign policy in accordance with Eisenhower's guidelines. But he was also a crisis response mechanism as evidenced by his continual travels abroad to meet with foreign leaders; Dulles faced the problem first-hand and tried to deal with the issues rather than postpone action. The collegial relationship, along with the high level of trust and confidence between Eisenhower and Dulles, gave the Secretary a great deal of power. A potential problem with such a relationship is that the burden of evaluating options is placed upon the President and Secretary of State. The danger here lies in limiting possible options, especially if the Secretary chooses to become an advocate of a certain policy. This can be remedied by consulting with other advisors in order to obtain more diverse solutions to foreign policy problems. Another possible danger is that the Secretary could serve as a screen for vital information. The President makes decisions based upon the information he receives; if the information is poor, the resulting decision can be disastrous. Eisenhower was able to deal with these shortcomings by developing mechanisms such as the Staff Secretary and establishing contacts with other advisors.

John F. Kennedy was less successful in achieving a balance between the two approaches. The impact of the

reorganized NSC and the ineffectual State Department on Kennedy's policy outputs were tremendous. Kennedy's reliance on the collegial approach was not sufficient to manage foreign policy because it led to the creation of ad hoc policies. Kennedy's initial Vietnam policy in 1961 and all subsequent decisions about Vietnam were made based upon the advice from his senior advisors. There was never a process to reevaluate whether or not American involvement in Southeast Asia was essential to achieving overarching US objectives. If a serious reassessment had occurred in 1961, the US could have taken steps to resolve the problem earlier, rather than to wait for the situation to improve. A serious evaluation of US purposes in the region could have answered Robert Kennedy's question of September 1963: "Could a Communist grab be prevented with any Saigon government?"<sup>91</sup> A formalistic system modeled along Eisenhower's NSC could have conducted such an evaluation and eliminated the need for the many survey missions Kennedy sent to Vietnam. Such a system would have served as another forum for debate; it could have provided dissenters a greater voice and added more weight to their argument. Stronger arguments against further involvement might have swayed Kennedy to choose a more decisive long term solution rather than serve his often predilection for an immediate fix.

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<sup>91</sup>Brown, *Prelude*, 209.

A secondary impact of Kennedy's collegial approach was an increase in the influence of foreign policy advisors other than the Secretary of State. Despite a conspicuous absence during the deliberations over US involvement in Southeast Asia, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy played an important overall role in the Kennedy Administration foreign policy organization. After the Bay of Pigs, Bundy moved his office from the Old Executive Office Building into the White House; and thereby became more accessible to the President. As previously mentioned, the reduction of the NSC from the previous administration provided the National Security Advisor with far greater power. Bundy made contributions to the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the Cuban Missile Crisis; he became a confidant of the President. This rise in stature of the National Security Advisor would translate over to Walt Rostow, who succeeded Bundy. Rostow was pro-intervention and viewed Vietnam as a test of Communist national-liberation war theory.<sup>92</sup> Up through 1968 he recommended to Lyndon Johnson that the US make a greater military commitment to Vietnam.

Another position that grew in prominence was the Secretary of Defense. Robert McNamara was "one of the brightest of the Kennedy advisors in sheer intelligence."<sup>93</sup> Since the Secretary of State did not seek to dominate foreign

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<sup>92</sup>Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, (New York: Van Rees Press, 1969), 21.

<sup>93</sup>Hoopes, *Limits*, 21.

affairs, McNamara's advice had equal if not more weight with the President than Rusk's guidance. In fact the autonomy granted to McNamara to run the Defense Department was similar to the authority given to Dulles at the State Department in the previous Administration; this illustrates the faith Kennedy had in McNamara's abilities. If Rusk had been as dynamic at the State Department, he could have better supported the President's foreign policy decisions. After visiting South Vietnam in 1963, McNamara saw the situation again rapidly deteriorating after the Diem coup; he eventually became committed to keeping the South from falling to the Communists. He would also recommend wider US intervention to Johnson. The increased importance of the National Security Advisor and the Secretary of Defense demonstrate the cost of a weak Secretary of State. This balancing of powers continues to the present. Although it is not detrimental in and of itself to the making of foreign policy, the President needs to be aware of this power shift and how it impacts upon foreign policy.

#### **A.ORGANIZING FOREIGN POLICY MECHANISMS**

In understanding the consequences of the formalistic and collegial approaches, one can establish an organization that incorporates the best qualities of each. The formalistic approach should be used to create an organization that



systematically analyzes foreign policy issues and develops policies, while the collegial approach should be utilized to build a mechanism to deal with immediate requirements and crises. Therefore a President should develop a two-tiered system with each tier dedicated to a specific approach and operating in parallel. The lower tier would utilize the formalistic approach and support the upper collegial tier. The formalistic tier should be a re-organized National Security Council modeled similarly to Eisenhower's NSC. Such a system was successful in developing policy papers through rigorous research and analysis. It maintained a body of policy papers that not only provided guidance, but continuity between administrations. This tier must integrate policy among the various governmental agencies through an inter-agency planning committee like the Planning Board. The National Security Advisor should resume his role as "honest broker" and political confidant to the President, rather than serve as a challenger to the Secretary of State. Finally, this system must have regularly scheduled meetings so that the decision maker can be kept informed and, more importantly, forced to directly face foreign policy problems, rather than allow them to become long drawn-out affairs. The upper tier uses the collegial approach because it is composed of the President's closest advisors and needs to be able to respond to the immediate needs of foreign policy. This tier would be modeled along either the Eisenhower/Dulles

relationship or the Kennedy circle of close advisors, depending upon the President's leadership style. There should be a strong Secretary of State and a vigorous State Department. The Secretary of State does not necessarily need to dominate the other agencies; it does need to be aggressive in exerting its influence upon the foreign affairs of the United States. A weak State Department will allow the National Security Advisor and Secretary of Defense greater influence and possibly skew policy towards options that rely less on diplomatic solutions. As noted earlier the President needs to be made aware of the dynamics and costs that surround each approach.

Today a President cannot afford to start learning how to manage foreign policy once he takes power. He only has three years in office to carry out his foreign policy goals; the fourth year tends to be dedicated towards a re-election campaign and seldom yields bold and dramatic policies, even if a foreign crisis calls for action. In the last thirty years there has only been one full-term Presidency - the Reagan Administration. A two-term President is one who is able to develop, implement and achieve results with his policies. During the last three decades there has been a shift in power away from the Executive Branch towards the Legislative Branch which has tried to assert its influence over foreign affairs. The Congress cannot possibly manage foreign policy because of its diversity. Therefore foreign

policy must emanate from the President. The dynamics of the Presidency make great demands upon the President's time and attention. A focus primarily on domestic concerns while ignoring foreign problems, in hopes they will work themselves out, can hurt US national security in the long run. Vietnam started off as a small problem that was placed on the back burner rather than dealt with in a frank manner. The entire tragedy could have been avoided if the Kennedy Administration had faced the issue squarely and created realistic solutions instead of waiting for the situation to take care of itself. Foreign policy is an ongoing process that requires both continual attention and flexibility to respond to uncertainty. Utilizing the formalistic and collegial approaches defined in this work can help a President manage foreign affairs.



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